

YMCA of Coastal Georgia Inc.

Axence nVision helps manage network at YMCA of Coastal Georgia Inc.

General Information

The YMCA of Coastal Georgia is a regional association of YMCA's. The association consists of 12 branches with 8 physical locations. These locations are spread out amongst 4 different counties in Southeast Georgia. Each branch has its own internet service provided by 5 different companies based on geographical location as well as provider availability. The entire network is made up of a mixture of T-1, DSL, and Cable internet providers and is tied together with a Linksys Hardware VPN system. There are more than 200 network devices and computers on the Network: Cisco Routers, SonicWall Firewall, Linksys VPN, HP Procurve managed switches, private and public wireless routers, PC's, printers, and servers (Windows 2000/2003 Servers and Linux server).

Matthew Cruikshank
IT Administrator YMCA of Coastal Georgia

Matthew Cruikshank has been in the computer industry professionally for about 12 years. His certifications include A+, Network+, several MCP's in Windows NT, and 2000 server +TCP/IP and CCNA. Several other Certifications of completion from Microsoft for Exchange 2003, Windows Server 2003, MSSQL Server, and Windows XP. Matthew Cruikshank is an expert in TCP/IP and Security. He was hired by the YMCA of Coastal Georgia as their IT Director to get a good Wide Area Network in place as well as provide database, desktop, and software support.

Problems that needed solving

The two largest problems we had that needed a solution were Asset and License management. With computers scattered all over 4 counties and only a set of IT Guidelines that were not enforced, occasional visits to remote branches in different counties almost always turned up unlicensed, unauthorized, or unsafe software. As the only IT person for this organization it became a very daunting task to also keep up with an access database I created to try and manage our hardware assets. Branches were used to not having an IT department and constantly accepting donations or buying and donating equipment without my knowledge. These things resulted in auditing problems, weak spots in network security, and liability towards software companies for license violations.

The design of our VPN Network made remote control of desktops a problem as well. Windows Help features worked very sporadically. The VNC server running on the machines was a resource hog. This caused many unnecessary drives to a branch for very simple fixes. There are very few users in this organization that have the ability to describe a problem with enough detail

to help me troubleshoot it over the phone and most employees were unwilling to try and walk through the solution.

One other problem we faced was worker productivity. Functionality required access to the internet and many employees took full advantage of having the internet and were spending far too much time in unproductive endeavors on Myspace and Facebook. Solutions that were being considered for resolving this included routing everyone through our corporate office and installing a proxy server. Another less expensive but much more labor intensive idea was for me to manually maintain URL Block lists on every branch individual router. Neither of these solutions was ideal but they were what we had.

The last problem I was considering solutions for was software pushes, registry and setting changes, and other PC related fixes that needed to happen behind the scenes. Active Directory and Group Policy are wonderful tools especially if you are competent with VB scripting but I have not achieved that competency

yet so was considering things like WSUS, SMS, and MOM. These are all wonderful tools but they all require a level of scripting to be effective that I didn't have. Combine that with the cost of these programs and they were not feasible. With our devices scattered all over the region it was a nightmare for me if something was going to change with our network that would require a setting change on all the PC's

Solution

I had tried several programs that all promised to solve some of the above problems. Some would have worked well except their cost was out of reach. Others fell short of their promises or were too hard to learn, setup, and operate. nVision installed flawlessly and the instructions to get started were easy to follow.

The first nice surprise was that nVision actually went out and found all the remote branches and created one large map with all of our devices. No other software tried was able to do this right out of the box. To make this easy on myself I created one map for each branch as well. It found everything on our network that had power to it. I was quite pleased.

To see how it did with the asset and license management I followed the directions to get WMI running and all other settings needed using group policy. The next day I was very pleased and impressed to see the most accurate hardware inventory I had seen to date from any software. I was also able to very rapidly confirm we had proper licensing for all our Microsoft products and had an immediate list of PC's that needed unapproved software removed. After that I was sold but I wanted

to see how it handled the rest of what it offered so I started installing the nVision agent. Out of 100 PC's I had to go around and touch 3 of them and manually install the agent. Those were PC's that never actually logged into the domain so they never got the Group Policy instructions.

I needed to change DNS settings on all our PC's and could have done it with a VB Login script but decided to give nVision a try. It pushed up the bat file very well and all the PC's that were turned on at the time successfully took the new settings. The next day I was able to go into each one remote control wise and finish the few that were left. This saved a week of me driving around to different branches.

Having the remote control and software upload features has been a huge bonus for this software. The User Activity tab has been a huge help as well. Just spreading the word that I could now see how much time was spent surfing coupled with the splash screen announcing they are being monitored has completely eliminated wasteful surfing. Every major issue I needed a solution to regarding Network administration has been solved by nVision.

Daily Administration

Besides having a running account of software licences and hardware, the custom counters and reporting features have been amazing. Coupled with the alerts it is now very simple for me to spot and diagnose network and PC problems before the users themselves even know there is a problem. Every day when I come in I can with a glance see if any of my branches are experiencing Network issues or if any of the computers are experiencing heavy CPU or memory loads. Planning New PC rotation, Memory upgrades and better assessing the daily needs of the branches has become 100's of times easier with nVision.

Software support and training has also been revolutionized here. Calls for help with features of software can now be dealt with on the spot instead of scheduling a time to drive out or trying to explain features and walk people through steps over the phone. This ability alone has saved an estimated 44 hours of wasted time over the last 30 days. I won't even mention how much trouble it saved the IT department and the organization as a whole while I went on vacation.